Models of Trilingual Education in Ethnic Minority Regions of China Project

Technical Paper No.2

The Study of Ethnolinguistic Vitality

Anwei Feng & Bob Adamson

April 2013

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This research project offers a holistic and descriptive account of trilingualism and trilingual education in China. Policy changes have led to the introduction of English language teaching and learning in primary schools. These reforms pose particular challenges to communities in ethnic minority areas, where Putonghua often competes with the minority language, and English is often taught in under-resourced schools with teachers with the requisite training in short supply.

The project involves extensive and intensive research comprising investigations into school- and community-level practices, policies and perceptions relating to trilingualism in such key regions as Xinjiang, Yunnan, Inner Mongolia, Sichuan, Gansu, Guizhou, Guangxi, Qinghai, Jilin, Tibet and Guangdong. Using first-hand data collected from each region, the researchers examine language policies and curricula, as well as language allocation in the classroom and in the community, and analyse them in their specific historical, socio-political, demographical, economic, geographical and cultural contexts.

A distinctive feature of the project is its presentation of a new methodology and approach to researching such phenomena. This methodology encompasses policy analysis, community language profiles, as well as school-based field work in order to provide rich data that facilitates multilevel analysis of policy-in-context.

Models of Trilingual Education in Ethnic Minority Regions of China Project Technical Papers Series Editors: Anwei Feng (University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China) and Bob Adamson (The Education University of Hong Kong)

This series of Technical Papers presents information about the research instruments used in this project.

The Study of Ethnolinguistic Vitality

Introduction

One of the key research questions driving the project is how the policy goals of trilingualism is being interpreted and realised in the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The project distinguished four distinct policy models of trilingual education (Adamson and Feng, 2013). The first model focuses strongly on the ethnic minority language. Typically, the nine years of compulsory education from Grade 1 in primary schools to Grade 3 in junior secondary schools is provided through the medium of the minority language. Chinese and English are taught as subjects in the curriculum. Chinese could be used as the medium of instruction for certain school subjects in late primary and secondary years. The second model is a balance between Chinese and the minority language. The balance is evident in terms not only of the medium of instruction but also of the ethnicity of the teachers and students. The third model often exists in two different forms. The first form is the reverse of the first model, i.e., Chinese is used as the primary medium instruction and the major ethnic minority language is taught as a subject to all students in the school, irrespective of their own ethnicity or mother tongue. The second form is found in many remote village schools in which one minority group dominates. In these schools, the minority language is used as the medium of instruction for the first two to three years with Chinese taught as a major school subject. Starting from Year 3 or Year 4, all school subjects are taught in Chinese. In both cases, English is taught as a school subject, with Chinese being used when necessary in those lessons. A fourth model is represented by schools that proclaim to be an ethnic minority language school but, in reality, do not use the minority language as the medium of instruction nor even teach it as school subject. Such schools also claimed to be bilingual, in the sense that Chinese and English are studied as languages in the curriculum and Chinese serves as the medium of instruction.

Factors Shaping the Trilingual Education Models

What factors shape and sustain the various models of trilingual education? This question denotes a particular view of education policy—that it emerges from, and forms part of broader contexts.
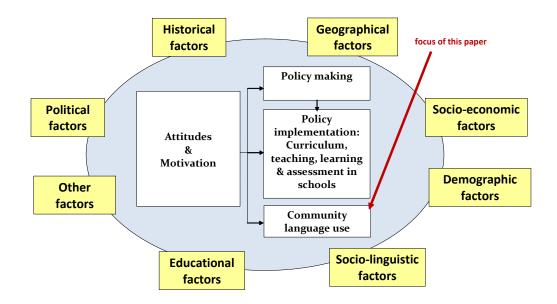
At the outset of the project, it was possible (on the basis of relevant literature) to identify key contextual factors that would likely play a role in shaping trilingual education policy. For instance, Fägerlind and Saha (1989) propose a triadic framework that positions education policy under the influence of socio-economic, socio-political and educational priorities.

A key concept for the study is ethnolinguistic vitality, the strength of life force of a language within a community. Ethnolinguistic vitality is influenced by geographical, historical, demographic and socio-linguistic factors, in addition to socio-economic and socio-political factors (Landweer, 2000). Other factors, such as religion, are emerging from the first phase of the project.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework for the study of models of trilingual education in the PRC.

Figure 1—Conceptual framework

Historical factors

Geographical factors

focus of this paper

Political factors

Attitudes & Motivation

Policy making

Policy implementation: Curriculum, teaching, learning & assessment in schools

Socio-economic factors

Other factors

Community language use

Demographic factors

Educational factors

Socio-linguistic factors

To conduct the research into the factors that shape and sustain the various models of trilingual education, a range of methodological tools were adopted.

A suite of research tools as shown in Table 1 were designed. A typical study of each single school would include:

- focus group interviews with 3-6 community leaders
- 2-3 interviews with regional and local education officials
- 1-3 interviews with school principal, deputy and other school leaders
- focus group interviews with 5-10 teachers
- focus group interviews with approximately 10 students
- 3-5 interviews with former students
- focus group interviews with approximately 10 parents
- documentary analysis of policy papers, syllabuses, timetables, learning resources and curriculum materials
- 5-10 lesson observations
- questionnaire surveys focusing on language attitudes and views of trilingual education among 60-100 students, 20-30 teachers including headteachers and deputies.
- field notes (e.g. observations of the school buildings and wall decorations, of languages used in the school outside of the classroom and of language use in the community.

These tools are described in detail in other Technical Papers in this series.

Table 1 – Methods to study factors that shape and sustain the models of trilingual education

Paradigm	Instrument	Focus
Qualitative	Semi-structured interview with head-teachers and teachers (focus groups or individuals)	Perceptions of and attitudes to trilingualism and each language, and their experiences implementing trilingual education models
	Semi-structured interview with policy makers (for individuals)	Perceptions of & attitudes to trilingualism and each language, and their experiences in policy making and implementation of trilingual education policy
	Semi-structured interview with parents (focus group or individuals)	Attitudes to different languages, their knowledge of what is going on in schools and their experiences of their children's trilingual education
	Semi-structured interview with pupils (focus group or individuals)	Attitudes and experiences in using and learning languages in a trilingual education context
	School observation	Language environment: notice boards, signs, pictures, etc.; languages used by staff, pupils, etc.; the role and distribution of languages, as shown in curriculum documents
	Classroom observation	languages used by teacher and pupils, for classroom instruction and activities
	Ethnographic study	To study the language environment in a minority community
Quantitative	Teacher Questionnaire	Teacher's perceptions of current practice, views of language use and views concerning language education
	Parent Questionnaire	Parents' knowledge of current practice and views of language use and language education
	Student Questionnaire	Students' attitude to current practice and views of language use and language education
	Subjective vitality survey	Ethnolinguistic vitality of a minority language
Other (Archival)	Objective vitality study	Ethnolinguistic vitality of a minority language by collecting data through archives, mass media, official documents, etc.

Ethnolinguistic Vitality

Giles et al. (1977: 308), in their seminal paper, defines ethnolinguistic vitality as the liveliness 'which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intercultural situations'. Vitality is claimed to be measurable by researching three classes of factors, namely status, demography and institutional support. These factors are represented in Figure 2.

It is assumed that, for the group of status factors, the more status a linguistic group is recognised to have, the more vitality it possesses. Ethnolinguistic groups whose demographic trends are favourable are more likely to have vitality as distinctive groups than those whose demographic trends are unfavourable and not conducive to group survival. The vitality of a linguistic group is also related to the degree its language is used in various institutions of the government, church, business and so forth.
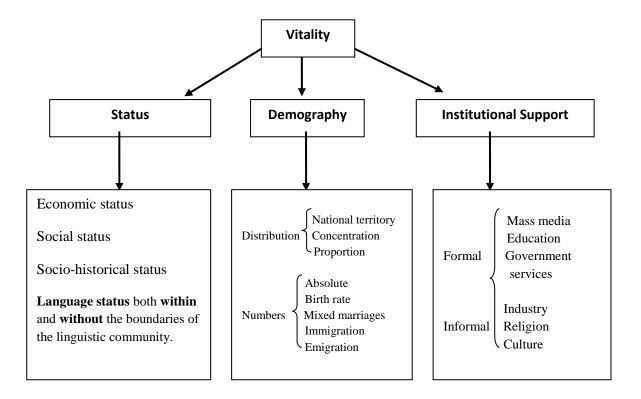
Figure 2 – An adapted taxonomy of the structural variables affecting ethnolinguistic vitality from Giles el al. (1977: 309)

The vitality of a linguistic group can be measured both objectively and subjectively. Careful analysis and evaluation of the combined effects of three main factors of group vitality using status, demographic and institutional support data gathered from 'objective' secondary sources are often made for comparing ethnolinguistic groups in cross-cultural research (Bourhis et al. 1981). For example, by using data from various sources, Giles et al. (1977: 317) put five ethnolinguistic groups in America on a continuum of vitality ranging from very high to very low as shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2 – Suggested vitality configurations of five ethnolinguistic groups

Group	Status	Demographic	Institutional support	Overall vitality
Anglo-American	Very High	High	High	High
French Canadian	Low-medium	High	Medium	Medium-high
Welsh	Medium	Medium	Low-medium	Medium
Mexican-American	Low	Medium	Low-medium	Low-medium
Albanian-Greek	Low	Low	Very Low	Low

Ethnolinguistic vitality can also be measured subjectively by investigating a group's perceptions of and attitudes towards its own vitality. Nowadays, many researchers argue the perceived ethnolinguistic vitality by speakers of a minority group is more important for maintaining its language and its culture (Giles, 2001). There seems to be a consensus that a reliable assessment of a linguistic group's vitality is perhaps best achieved by combining objective information obtained through secondary research and subjective data acquired through empirical research. On the basis of Giles et al.'s (1977) model as represented in Figure 1, Bourhis et al. (1981:151-155) developed a 'Subjective Vitality Questionnaire' (SVQ) for their empirical investigation into the vitality of a group of Greek descent living in Melbourne, focusing on their perceptions of and attitudes towards their own vitality. In the past few decades, researchers in many parts of the world have followed the same or similar procedure to conduct studies into the vitality of different ethnolinguistic groups (e.g., Aitchison & Carter, 2000; Johnson, 2009; Kindell & Lewis, 2000; Kraemer & Olshtain, 1989; Kraemer et al., 1994; Pierson et al. 1987; Pierson, 1994).

For the current project, an important task is to study the vitality of the linguistic group(s) in the relevant region, province or prefecture. Objective ethnolinguistic vitality will be assessed by searching and using secondary sources including census data, state or local statistics, mass media information, economic, sociological and historical documents as well as publications related to the group. Subjective vitality will be evaluated through a Subjective Vitality Questionnaire (SVQ) survey which is an adapted version from Bourhis et al. (1981:151-155). A sample of this questionnaire is shown in the Appendix.

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Appendix

Sample Ethnolinguistic Vitality Survey

We are a group of researchers conducting a research project on language education, including minority home language, Chinese and English, for schools dominated by minority pupils in China. In this questionnaire, we are interested in what you know about the Yi Nationality in Xichang. You may feel that you have insufficient information to give a good answer to the questions, yet it is your *impression* that we are interested in. The questionnaire takes about 15-20 minutes to complete. Please give answers to all the questions in this survey. Lastly, we assure you that your personal identity will remain confidential. The data collected from this survey will be used for research purpose only.

Part I – Something about Yourself (Please write short answers or tick the boxes)

- Gender: Male ☐   Female ☐

- Your ethnic background (Nationality): ……………..……...

- Highest education received: Primary School ☐   Junior Middle School ☐   Senior Middle School ☐   Technical College ☐   University or above ☐

- Age range: 20 or below ☐   21 to 25 ☐   26 to 30 ☐   31 to 35   ☐ 36 to 45 ☐   46 to 55 ☐   56 and above ☐

- How good are you in these languages:

	Fluent	OK	Limited	No knowledge at all
Chinese				
Yi Language				
Other				

Part 2 – Please answer each question below by circling the box you think is *perhaps the best answer*.

1. Estimate the proportion in percentage of the Xichang population made up of the following groups:

a) People of Yi Nationality

0%	20%	40%	50%	60%	80%	100%

b) People of Han Nationality

0%	20%	40%	50%	60%	80%	100%

2. How highly regarded are the following languages in Xichang?

a) Yi Language

Not at all	Low	Low Medium	Medium	Medium high	High	Extremely High

b) Chinese Language

Not at all	Low	Low Medium	Medium	Medium high	High	Extremely High

3. How highly regarded are the following languages outside Xichang?

a) Yi Language

Not at all	Low	Low Medium	Medium	Medium high	High	Extremely High

b) Chinese Language

Not at all	Low	Low Medium	Medium	Medium high	High	Extremely High

4. How often are the following languages used in Xichang public services (e.g., government offices, courts, hospitals, etc.)?

a) Yi Language

Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Half of the time	Often	Most of the time	Exclusively

b) Chinese Language

Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Half of the time	Often	Most of the time	Exclusively

5. Estimate the birth rate of the following groups of people in Xichang:

a) People of Yi Nationality

Decreasing sharply	Decreasing	Decreasing slightly	Same as before	Increasing slightly	Increasing	Increasing sharply

b) People of Han Nationality

Decreasing sharply	Decreasing	Decreasing slightly	Same as before	Increasing slightly	Increasing	Increasing sharply

6. How much control for the following groups have over economic and business matters in Xichang?

a) People of Yi Nationality

None at all	A little	Some	Half of control	Much	Lots of control	Exclusively

b) People of Han Nationality

None at all	A little	Some	Half of control	Much	Lots of control	Exclusively

7. How well-represented are the following languages in the Xichang mass media?

a) Yi Language

Not at all	A little	Less than Chinese	Half and half	More than Chinese	Very well	Extremely well

b) Chinese Language

Not at all	A little	Less than Yi	Half and half	More than Yi	Very well	Extremely well

8. How highly regarded are the following groups in Xichang?

a) People of Yi Nationality

Not at all	Low	Low Medium	Medium	Medium high	High	Extremely High

b) People of Han Nationality

Not at all	Low	Low Medium	Medium	Medium high	High	Extremely High

9. How much are the following languages taught in Xichang schools?

a) Yi Language

| Not at all | Rarely | Some | Half of the time | Quite a lot | Most of the time | Exclusively |

b) Chinese Language

| Not at all | Rarely | Some | Half of the time | Quite a lot | Most of the time | Exclusively |

10. How many of the following groups immigrate into Xichang each year?

a) People of Yi Nationality

| None at all | A few | Some | Medium | Considerable | Many | Very many |

b) People of Han Nationality

| None at all | A few | Some | Medium | Considerable | Many | Very many |

11. To what extent do the following groups marry only within their own groups?

a) People of Yi Nationality

| None at all | A few | Some | Medium | Considerable | Many | Exclusively |

b) People of Han Nationality

| None at all | A few | Some | Medium | Considerable | Many | Exclusively |

12. How much political power do the following groups have in Xichang?

a) People of Yi Nationality

| None at all | A little | Some | Medium | Considerable | Much | Complete |

b) People of Han Nationality

| None at all | A little | Some | Medium | Considerable | Much | Complete |

13. How well-represented are the following languages in the Xichang business sectors?

a) Yi Language

| Not at all | A little | Less than Chinese | Half and half | More than Chinese | Very well | Extremely well |

b) Chinese Language

Not at all	A little	Less than Yi	Half and half	More than Yi	Very well	Extremely well

14. How many of the following groups emigrate from Xichang to other places each year?

a) People of Yi Nationality

None at all	A few	Some	Medium	Considerable	Many	Very many

b) People of Han Nationality

None at all	A few	Some	Medium	Considerable	Many	Very many

15. How proud of their cultural history and achievements do you feel the following groups are in Xichang?

a) People of Yi Nationality

Not at all	Low	Low Medium	Medium	Medium high	Very	Extremely

b) People of Han Nationality

Not at all	Low	Low Medium	Medium	Medium high	Very	Extremely

16. How well-represented are the following groups in the cultural life of Xichang (e.g., festivals, concerts, art exhibitions, etc.)?

a) People of Yi Nationality

Not at all	A little	Less than Han	Half and half	More than Han	Very well	Extremely well

b) People of Han Nationality

Not at all	A little	Less than Yi	Half and half	More than Han	Very well	Extremely well

17. How strong and active do you feel the following groups are in preserving their language and culture in Xichang?

a) People of Yi Nationality

Not at all	A little	Low Medium	Medium	Medium high	Very	Extremely

b) People of Han Nationality

Not at all	A little	Low Medium	Medium	Medium high	Very	Extremely

18. How wealthy do you feel the following groups are in Xichang?

a) People of Yi Nationality

Not at all	Low	Low Medium	Medium	Medium high	High	Extremely

b) People of Han Nationality

Not at all	Low	Low Medium	Medium	Medium high	High	Extremely

19. In general, how much contact do the following groups have with each other?

People of Yi and Han Nationalities

Not at all	A little	Some	Medium	Considerable	Much	Very much

20. How likely do you feel the following group in Xichang will be assimilated into the majority Han culture in 20 to 30 years from now?

People of Yi Nationality

Not likely at all	A little	Probably	Hard to say	Likely	Highly likely	No doubt

21. Please write anything you wish to add below about the present status and future prospects of the Yi language and people below:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

MANY THANKS!!!